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# Social and Economic Education for Development

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## Introduction to Group Facilitation

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### Facilitation: A Contract

**A facilitator is a neutral selected by a group to manage a deliberative or negotiation process. The facilitator's interest, therefore, is not in the nature of the particular outcome but maintaining the integrity of the process.**

**The facilitator is a powerful role. The facilitator:**

- ▶ Controls the flow and pacing of the meeting process,
- ▶ Sets the tone for discussions,
- ▶ Helps the group focus on important items, make decisions, and get the work done.

**The facilitator's power to manage the group process is authorized solely by the group.**

The group authorized the facilitator to guide them and can withdraw its consent at any time.

**To establish this authority...**

- ▶ Introduce yourself and explain how you came to be in the role. Then,
- ▶ Define your role **AND GET CONSENT.**
- ▶ Review the agenda **AND GET CONSENT.**
- ▶ Review priorities **AND GET CONSENT.**
- ▶ Define ground rules **AND GET CONSENT.**

The facilitator draws on the **CONSENT** during the meeting to keep the group on track and under control.

## Basic Steps to More Effective Meetings

### *When Not to Hold a Meeting*

- There is inadequate data or poor preparation
- Something could be communicated better by telephone, memo, or one-on-one conversation
- The decision has already been made
- There is too much anger or hostility

### *Why Hold a Meeting?*

- To get advice from a group
- To clarify an issue
- To determine if there is a problem within or among groups, and if so, who should be responsible for dealing with it
- To resolve problems that involve different groups
- To make a decision or solve a problem

### *Determine the Desired Outcomes*

Develop a clear, concise statement of the results or products that the group wants from the meeting. For example:

- A list of concerns about the proposed personnel policy
- A set of actions necessary to open a youth recreation center in our community

### *Develop a Meeting Agenda*

An agenda serves the following purposes:

- A guide to help people prepare for the meeting
- A road map to follow during the meeting
- An outline for organizing meeting minutes

An agenda should include:

- What issues will be discussed (content)?
- How will the group address the issue (process)?
- Who is responsible for aspects of the meeting (roles)?

### *Prepare Suggested Ground Rules*

Ground rules are shared expectations about who may attend meetings, how discussions will be conducted, and how decisions will be made. Some examples of ground rules are:

- One speaker at a time
- Keep to task and topic
- Be concise
- We listen to each other
- Everyone participates, no one dominates
- Honor time limits
- It's OK to disagree
- Attack the problem, not a person
- Decide together recognizing that consensus does not mean we all agree to everything

### *Five Criteria for Effective Problem Solving Meetings*

- Participants address one subject at a time
- Participants all follow the same process
- Roles are clearly defined and agreed upon
- Conversation is open and balanced
- People and their ideas are protected from attack

### **Facilitator Preventions and Interventions Ordered by the Five Criteria for Effective Problem-Solving Meetings**

#### *Address One Subject at a Time*

- Get group agreement in advance on desired outcomes and agenda
- Keep the agenda in view during the meeting
- Get permission in advance to keep the discussion focused on the agenda issues
- Use flip charts to record discussions and keep the record of discussions in view of the group
- Summarize and confirm agreements and next steps
- Record new issues on flip chart to assure they have been understood and will be remembered
- Remind the group of the issues they agreed to discuss and re-negotiate the meeting agenda if necessary

#### *Follow One Process at a Time*

- Get group agreement in advance on an agenda and keep the agenda in view during the meeting
- Get permission in advance to keep the group using one process
- Get agreement on a way to proceed before proceeding
- Remind the group of the process they agreed to use
- Provide information to the group on the process they agreed to use
- Re-direct the group back to the process they agreed to use

### *Clearly Define and Agree Upon Roles*

- Make roles (scribe, timer, ground rules monitor) explicit at the beginning of the meeting
- Include role definitions as part of the ground rules
- Get agreement from the group to follow the directions or requests of role occupants
- Offer reminders when people step out of roles

### *Conversation is Open and Balanced*

- Get agreement on ground rules for the discussion and post them in view of the group
- Get permission in advance to help maintain an open dialogue
- Be positive to encourage participation
- Thank people for contributing ideas
- Go around the room asking each person to speak. Ask the quieter people what they think.
- Establish a queue when several people want to speak
- Float a trial balloon: "I haven't heard anyone mention....yet, is that relevant here?"
- Ask participants to "walk in someone else's shoes" or to consider why those who do not share their opinions would argue for the other side

### *People and Their Ideas Are Protected From Attack*

- Get agreement on ground rules for the discussion and post them in view of the group
- Model courtesy
- Provide a protective space around those expressing opinions or ideas others may disagree with
- Record ideas on flip charts without attribution
- Listen to and watch the group as it works together
- Acknowledge people's feelings when they are expressed
- Call for breaks to diffuse tension
- Diffuse intense emotions by looking at the speaker, accepting their feelings as legitimate, and paraphrasing to ensure you understand. Do not try to minimize, joke about, or resolve intense feelings.

## **Maintaining a Group Memory A Visual Record of the Meeting**

The use of flip charts to record key points of a group discussion is a mechanism for maintaining a group memory of the meeting. A visible and visual record of the discussion performs several functions:

- Helps a group stay on task
- Helps a group retrace how they reached decisions
- Frees people from taking notes
- Demonstrates to participants their ideas are being heard accurately
- Prevents repetition
- Holds ideas for later problem-solving or discussion